

How a 3D model, surgery helped a Florida father avoid a heart transplant

VIDEO	AUDIO
NATS	(Heart monitor)
	"I was 38 minutes with no brain activity."
	<p>Joe Bitter's heart problems started in 2015.</p> <p>A retired law enforcement officer, avid boater, and competitive line dancer, he collapsed one night without warning.</p>
Joe Bitter Patient	"My biggest concern was just to stay alive."
	<p>Doctors in South Florida repaired one of his heart's valves and implanted a defibrillator.</p> <p>But soon after, his heart was again in distress.</p>
	"My defibrillator hit me and brought me back right away. But when it did, the wire moved and caused the damage to my heart."
	<p>Uncertain if he would live to the next holiday celebration with his family, Bitter was told a transplant was his only option.</p> <p>So he reached out to Mayo Clinic.</p>
	"Mayo was the very top and No. 1 in the state. I figured if anybody could do anything to help me, they could."
	An early appointment led to more concerning discoveries.
Parag Patel, M.D. Transplantation Medicine Mayo Clinic	"He first had a hole in between two chambers of his heart, as well as a hole that went outside of his heart. And so blood was actually pooled outside of the heart in a very dangerous situation. He actually also had a couple of valves that were very leaky."
	Dr. Parag Patel is a Mayo Clinic Transplantation Medicine Specialist and one member of Bitter's care team.

	After reviewing the complex issues at hand, the team printed a 3D model of Bitter's heart to prepare the strategy forward.
	"They could see it in their hands before they even open me up. And this has been amazing that they would do this for me."
NATS	(Operating room)
	Surgery in August 2020 focused on fixing Bitter's heart – helping him avoid a transplant. Weeks after leaving the hospital, Bitter and his wife Susan celebrated their 45 th wedding anniversary – a joyful day the couple didn't think they would see.
Susan Bitter Joe Bitter's wife	"Joy, because that's what it is. That's what it's all about."
	As his health improved, Bitter returned to the water – fishing and even buying a new boat. His progress has also made an impact on Dr. Patel.
NATS	(Dr. Patel meeting Joe)
	"The best thing is, you know, seeing Mr. Bitter in clinic every couple of months, and we've gotten to the point where we're not always talking about the medical issues. We've gotten to the point where we're talking about 'How's life?'"
	A life Bitter has reclaimed.
	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm Alex Osiadacz.